

# A Fisheries Information System for Bangladesh

**B**angladesh is called "land of rivers" as it has more than 1.58 million ha of permanent waters, 2.83 million ha of seasonal inland waters and 480 km of coastline.

The fisheries sector is of considerable importance in the economy of Bangladesh. The contribution of fishery resources to foreign exchange earnings is also commendable, making up 11% of the nation's export earnings in recent years. It is generally estimated that about 8% of the nation's population directly and indirectly depends on fishing and ancillary industries for their livelihood.

Fisheries also contribute 74% of the animal protein in our daily diet, but the fisheries program did not receive adequate attention and priority until the early 1980s. Better awareness of fisheries research and development has grown primarily with the high demand for shrimps, fish and frogs' legs in the international market. In 1982-83 Bangladesh earned Taka 1,500 million (Taka 31 = US\$1) from shrimp exports.

The Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) published in 1982 inventories on the status of fisheries research in Bangladesh. The National Seminar on Fisheries Research which was held in September of that year made various recommendations, including the preparation of a master plan for fisheries research and the setting up of a National Institute of Fisheries Research. Most of these recommendations are now being implemented.

In Bangladesh, fisheries research is carried out by the following organizations:

**Universities:** University of Dhaka, Department of Zoology; Bangladesh Agricultural University, Faculty of Fisheries; University of Chittagong, Institute of Marine Sciences and Department of Zoology;

**Government Organizations:** Directorate of Fisheries, Dhaka; Fisheries Research Institute (FRI), Mymensingh; Riverine Fisheries Research Station, Chandpur; Freshwater Aquaculture Experimental Station, Mymensingh; Brackishwater Fisheries Research Station, Khulna; Marine Fisheries Research Station, Chittagong; Mariculture and Coastal Aquaculture Research Station,

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Cox's Bazaar; Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation (BFDC), Dhaka; Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), Dhaka; Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, Dhaka; Space Research and Remote Sensing Organization (SPARSO), Dhaka; Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Dhaka.

Almost all of the above organizations/institutes and universities have functional libraries. But the picture in most libraries is not encouraging. There is a paucity of personnel in fisheries libraries which in turn affects the quality and quantity of services offered. In fact, the development of fisheries research in Bangladesh has not been accompanied by the setting up of a national fisheries information infrastructure and related services.

In the present day world, information is an essential input to any research and development activity. In Bangladesh this calls for the employment of more documentalists, librarians and information specialists capable of evaluating information and producing appropriate fisheries information packages. A provision for the setting up of a National Institute of Fisheries Research (NIFR) is included in the National Fisheries Plan. One of the objectives of the plan reads: "NIFR will serve as a national and regional forum to disseminate scientific information in the field of fisheries."

Considering the above recommendation, the Directorate of Fisheries or the Fisheries Research Institute (FRI) at Mymensingh (the institute being considered to perform the functions of the NIFR) should set up a strong library and information system for fisheries research, to be known as "Bangladesh Fisheries Information System (BAFIS)". There should be a network of libraries and documentation centers attached to fisheries research institutes, of which BAFIS should be the focal point. The Indonesian Fisheries Information System (IFIS) may serve as a model for BAFIS.

The objectives of BAFIS should be as follows:

(1) To monitor and pick up, control and process local/national fisheries information for input into the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Information System (ASFIS), via the Southeast Asian Fisheries Information System (SEAFIS).

(2) To publish a national fisheries bibliography and special bibliographies.

(3) To prepare and circulate a list of abstracts of local and foreign periodical articles.

(4) To prepare Bengali-language extension manuals for extension workers.

(5) To prepare directories, inventories, etc., of fisheries research projects and scientists.

(6) To upgrade personnel capabilities through a series of training courses.

(7) To equip network libraries to enable them to carry out the tasks mentioned above.

The network system will help foster interlibrary cooperation which may lead to cooperative acquisition, bibliographic exchanges and control, centralized processing of materials, better interlibrary lending, and photocopying services among the participating libraries and information centers. Successful fisheries information transfer has been seen to depend upon the following communication factors: all collaborating parties must understand each others' perspectives and motivations; all parties must understand the terms of agreement; long-term goals of collaboration (and probable results) should be discussed and problems recognized.

With the present increase in the number of universities and research institutes in Bangladesh and with the present focus on agricultural research particularly in the fisheries sectors, greater demands will be made by scientists on fisheries libraries and documentation centers in the future. Therefore, proper planning is necessary to harness fisheries information stored in machine-readable form by different international and regional agricultural and fisheries information systems and databanks. With the creation of BAFIS, Bangladesh will hopefully witness the free flow of fisheries information across its many rivers.